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JOINT COMMISSION  
APPOINTED TO ARRANGE FOR A  
WORLD CONFERENCE  
ON  
FAITH AND ORDER

"*Iva πάντες ἐν ὥσι, καθὼς σύ, πάτερ, ἐν ἐμοὶ κάγὼ ἐν σοι,  
ἴνα καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐν ἡμῖν ἐν ὥσιν, ίνα ὁ κόσμος πιστεύσῃ ὅτι  
σύ με ἀπέστειλας.*

*Ut omnes unum sint, sicut tu Pater in me, et ego in te, ut  
et ipsi in nobis unum sint, ut credat mundus, quia tu me  
misisti.*

*That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I  
in thee, that they also may be one in us; that the world may  
believe that thou hast sent me.*



THE CONFERENCE SPIRIT  
BY A LAYMAN

**A**T the General Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America in 1910, the following resolution was adopted:

**W**HHEREAS, There is to-day among all Christian people a growing desire for the fulfilment of our Lord's prayer that all His disciples may be one; that the world may believe that God has sent Him: RESOLVED,

That a Joint Commission be appointed to bring about a Conference for the consideration of questions touching Faith and Order, and that all Christian Communions throughout the world which confess our Lord JESUS CHRIST as God and Saviour be asked to unite with us in arranging for and conducting such a Conference. The Commission shall consist of seven Bishops, appointed by the Chairman of the House of Bishops, and seven Presbyters and seven Laymen, appointed by the President of the House of Deputies, and shall have power to add to its number and to fill any vacancies occurring before the next General Convention.



*Copies of this leaflet may be had free on application to the Secretary, Robert H. Gardiner, Gardiner, Maine, U.S.A., who will also enter on the mailing list those who signify to him, with their post-office addresses, a desire to receive the publications which the Commission expects to issue from time to time.*



*Contributions for the expenses of the Commission and the Conference may be sent to the Treasurer, George Zabriskie, 49 Wall Street, New York, U.S.A.*

# THE CONFERENCE SPIRIT

BY A LAYMAN

*[This paper is deemed worthy of publication by the Commission of the Protestant Episcopal Church on a World Conference on Faith and Order, which, however, does not hold itself responsible for any statement or opinion herein expressed.]*

THE World Conference on the Faith and Order of the Church of Christ is to be truly a conference, not a many sided debate, not a meeting to negotiate either surrender or compromise, nor a series of statements, each in the form of an ultimatum, of the conditions on which alone Reunion is conceived to be possible. The distinction is so deep and so obvious that there is great possibility that it may not be generally recognized, and that, if and when recognized, it will soon be forgotten. It is believed that every statement in this article as to the scope, purpose, and methods of the Conference is supported by the action of the General Convention and the Official State-

ment of the Commission on the World Conference, but the writer does not intend nor is he authorized to express more than his own opinion.

To those who fear the Conference lest it may result in compromise of the Faith, the short and conclusive answer is that no one asks or expects them to compromise or surrender anything. No one is to be asked in the Conference to give up anything, or, for that matter, to accept anything. The Conference is not to be in any way destructive, except so far as it removes ignorance, prejudice, and misunderstanding. The hope is that it will prepare for constructive work, for if the walls which separate us are laid low by such honest and loving examination of our differences as will show that some at least are not insuperable, it may be possible to include us all in the one fold. Even if it shall appear that those differences are fundamental, and that we must

separate again, we shall go away in loving, humble sorrow, not in angry pride and bitterness. Surely even in that case, the Conference will not have been futile. Even if every delegate present at the Conference desired a compromise, it could not be voted, and, if voted, would be merely void, for the Conference as proposed is to be "without power to legislate or to adopt resolutions." As for compromise of dignity, surely it is time that we should forget ourselves entirely in the effort to know and do the Master's Will. Alleged regard for the dignity of the Church is too often a mere cover for the egotistic pride of the individual who alleges it. Each communion as well as each individual must take to itself our Lord's commands,—"he that is greatest among you shall be your servant." "Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven."

There may be some who, though confident of the soundness of their faith, perhaps because they are confident, are unwilling to submit it to the chances of a joint debate. It may be that success in a joint debate depends as much on the ability and adroitness of the advocate as on the intrinsic merits of the cause he presents; but surely, if we approach the Conference in the right spirit, our reverence and awe will leave no room for tricks of oratory, and if we all ask God the Holy Ghost in earnestness and humility, He will preside and will be careful that the truth is adequately presented. Nor can any communion stultify itself by remaining out of the Conference from fear that what it holds to be the truth will not be made clear, for that would imply doubt alike of the soundness of its convictions and of its ability to draw from its whole number men competent to represent it. But the short and con-

clusive answer is that no joint debate, after the fashion of past polemics, is proposed. No one is to be asked or permitted either to submit his own principles to attack or to assail the convictions of others. He will be expected to listen to the statements of his brethren, not to consider how they may be controverted, but to see if there be not at least a grain of truth in them, remembering that “wherever the heart clings to religious sentiments, though they be misplaced, there still glimmers a spark of the divine fire which Christ came to enkindle upon earth.”\* “Thus, the verities which can be met with in all sects, for the last two thousand years, are radiations of the Word.”† But even if there be no grain of truth in a statement, neither the Conference nor any

\* Rev. Bernard J. Otten, S.J.: *The Catholic Church and Modern Christianity*, page 26.

† Quoted from Gabriel: *Le Christ et le Monde*, Paris, 1863, pages 12-14, 24-26, by Baring-Gould: *The Origin and Development of Religious Belief*, Part II, Christianity, page 161.

member of it is expected, nor will he be permitted, to do more than recognize wherein that statement differs from others. Whether particular statements be true or false is not to be discussed at the Conference. Nor will any statements be so authoritative as to demand contradiction in order to obviate the rule that silence gives consent. No authority or deference will be required to be given to the words of any delegate except that which is the just due of saintly character and godly wisdom and learning. All our concern as to the Conference is that each Communion shall so present its own convictions that they shall be most clear and least offensive to its brethren. The effort should be to follow the standard set for himself by Rev. Professor Otten, S. J.: "It is not the writer's direct intention to prove that Protestants are in the wrong, but rather to make it evident that Catholics are in the right. This may seem to

be a distinction without a difference; yet a difference there is, and one that offers a decided advantage, inasmuch as it eliminates the necessity of saying anything that might give offence to our separated brethren.”\* For, as the proposal of the Conference rests in “the belief that the beginnings of unity are to be found in the clear statement and full consideration of those things in which we differ, as well as of those things in which we are at one,” so the Conference is to be a “taking personal counsel together in the spirit of love and forbearance.”†

We cannot too often remind ourselves that it is not for us to try now in any way to anticipate the results of the Conference. Doubtless the preparations of the years which may, and doubtless must, precede the actual meeting,

\* Rev. Bernard J. Otten, S.J.: *The Catholic Church and Modern Christianity*, page 6.

† *Official Statement by the Commission of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States.*

will bring us closer together, and perhaps lead to the reunion, before the Conference is held, of some communions already near to each other. But this last is not the object of the proposal of the Conference. If it happens, it will be as an inevitable result of the development of that real humility and love for his brethren, and of that frank and considerate presentation of truth, which should be the distinguishing characteristic of every true Christian, no matter what his rank and dignity.

The main task before us in these years of preparation is to understand and attain the true conference spirit. That means no surrender, no compromise, no abandonment of the eternal and unchanging Faith.

The first step toward the attainment of the true conference spirit is that absolute surrender of our wills to

the Will of God which can come only through frequent, fervent prayer. Division is always the result of self-assertion. There is no intention here to deny that self-assertion may be sometimes, perhaps often, necessary, but self-assertion by a body of Christians is right only when its members have lost sight of and wholly surrendered their individual selves, so that they can, in absolute sincerity and truth, say with St. Paul, "not I, but Christ liveth in me." Only by prayer can we so cast out self that God the Holy Spirit may wholly direct our wills to His, and illumine our minds so that we can receive His truth and follow His wisdom.

For the individual or the communion to make such a surrender does not mean to approach the Conference with any lack of convictions. On the contrary, if the years of preparation are spent in earnest prayer and the consci-

entious effort to present the truth, convictions will be deepened and strengthened. But the spirit in which they are held will be changed.

Most of our differences come from different conceptions of the meaning of the facts of the Faith. To a great extent that is inevitable, for no two human minds can ever have exactly the same conception of the things which are seen, much less of the things which are unseen. Christ is not exactly the same to any two human minds, any more than He is to any two painters who have tried to paint their conception of Him. "After all, even the proposition 'two and two make four' is mere meaningless sound except as the apprehension of an apprehending mind; there may be many different *nuances* of meaning in the statement that 'it is wise to be virtuous'; whilst the words, 'I believe in God,' are capable of as many degrees of significance as there are va-

rying capacities of personal consciousness.”\* But to some extent, at least, we can bring our conceptions nearer together. My acceptance or refusal either of any intellectual proposition, or of God’s grace, depends upon my attitude. If I say I do not believe in God or care for His grace, I shall never know or love Him. If, when you are seeking to state the truth as you conceive it, I am saying to myself, “He is wrong always and absolutely, and I am entirely right,” neither will profit by our conference. Rather its failure will drive us further apart. But if I say, “Though I know I am right, and I believe him to be wrong, yet perhaps he is not wholly wrong; perhaps, though he expresses it differently, he means much the same as I do; perhaps even the patient consideration of his statement of what I know is not truth

\* Moberly: *Ministerial Priesthood*, 2d ed., Preface, page x.

may lead me to a fuller comprehension of what I know to be truth, and at any rate, I must allow Christ Who dwells in me to manifest His patient love for this man who is my brother," our minds and hearts and souls will open to each other, and each may learn. "True love, whether it be found in God or man, is unitive in character; it always tends to effect the most intimate union of heart with heart and soul with soul."\* You may deplore my errors, but if you love me as one for whom Christ died, that love will tend to unite us and to bring me to share your faith and knowledge of the truth.

We are not to empty ourselves of our whole antecedent content of mind and character. We are carefully to preserve all that capacity of insight into truth which God has graciously bestowed upon us in our birth, in our education, and in our experience. It is

\* Otten: *The Sacramental Life of the Church*, page 118.

the result of all these which constitutes a man's capacity of rational grasp of truth, just as of his acceptance of God's grace. We are not to throw away all our previous convictions. Only a man without a mind can approach the consideration of any subject with no more impressions than a sheet of blank paper. Our convictions are all the result of previous experience. Our religious convictions are our acceptance of so much of God's message to us as we have received or been able and willing to accept from the working of His Spirit in our hearts and through the teaching of parents, of pastors, of learned and godly men, of books, and above all of the Book of God, and of the Church which, through God the Holy Ghost, wrote and preserved that Book. I honor my father, neither by a blind, unthinking acceptance of his opinions, nor by a hasty, thoughtless rejection of them, but by weighing them in all humility

and respect, and if I must differ from him, by doing so in love and deep sorrow. I must cling as firmly as I can to the convictions he has instilled into me, in order that by their use, even by their correction, if they are not the deepest and truest, I may reach deeper and truer convictions, and that, if they be the deepest and truest, I may gain a clearer and more vital comprehension of them. "It is not in spite of certainties already reached, but by their help, that new truth is to be seen; even though the insight of truth may itself react upon them; and they always are ready to be modified in the interest of truth."\*

I cannot, if I have any mind at all, enter on the consideration of any subject, by myself or in conference, without the presuppositions which are the convictions gained through all the ex-

\* Moberly: *Ministerial Priesthood*, 2d ed., Preface, page vii.

perience, wide or limited, which God has seen fit to give me. But such reasonable and necessary presuppositions are totally different from the blind, unreasoning, un-Christian prejudice with which most of us listen to those whose convictions are different. While I must thank God for the convictions He has enabled me to reach, I must remember both my finite incapacity to comprehend more than a part of the infinity of His Truth, and the possibility that another, inferior though his conception may seem to be to mine, may comprehend something which God has not yet revealed to me. So while I should be ready to die the martyr's death for those convictions, I must reverently and confidently study them, that I may deepen and strengthen and expand, and, if necessary, correct them.

“For what is less consistent with our own self-respect than to neglect instituting the most careful and accurate in-

quiry into the grounds and foundation of our own religious belief: and convincing ourselves whether, and how far, we stand on a firm footing, or whether we have not placed ourselves on some treacherous covering that conceals beneath it an enormous abyss? . . .

“Every man accordingly owes it to himself to acquire the clearest conception of the doctrinal peculiarities, the inward power and strength, or the inward weakness and untenableness of the religious community whereof he acknowledges himself a member; a conception which entirely depends on a very accurate and precise knowledge of the opposite system of belief.”\*

What the Archbishop of Canterbury says as to a special question which has caused, and is causing, great bitterness in England, has deep value as

\* Moehler: *Symbolism*, 5th ed., translated by J. B. Robertson, pages xi, xii.

a general principle: “But, speaking for myself, I find that the value of my own certainty on any such question depends largely upon whether I have honestly striven to see it as my opponent sees it, and to weigh as well as I can the value—it may be the very sacred value—attaching to the arguments of an honest Christian man who is trying as steadily as I am to think and speak and act for the glory of God and the highest good of his fellow countrymen. . . .

“There is more than one relation of life in which the saying holds good that if you want your friend to cross the river to your side, you must go over to his side and fetch him. I have been speaking of controversialists and opponents. But it often happens that a little genuine and sympathetic study of other men’s ideals and aspirations will prove that, although the roadway followed may be different, the ideals

do not differ widely from our own.”\*

We are not to come to the Conference “wholly unprejudiced,” as that term is commonly used by unthinking persons, but with that earnest confidence in our convictions which is the mark of reason, and which, though it may seem to be a kind of pre-judgment, is really but a first step toward a fuller, deeper knowledge.

“Whereas, then, there is a kind of ‘prejudice’ which is inseparable from any power of reasonable apprehension, I would urge that the claim to be ‘wholly unprejudiced’ should be modified by a conception—if not humbler, at all events more complex and truthful—as to the necessary conditions of thinking; that instead of claiming to be wholly unbiassed, the mind that wishes to be scrupulously fair should rather acknowledge, and

\* Dr. Davidson, *Archbishop of Canterbury: The Character and Call of the Church of England*, pages 115, 116.

accept, and consciously scrutinize, the bias which it cannot be without.” \*

Most of what Dr. Moberly urges so strongly against the possibility of the absence of presuppositions is of great value in determining the attitude in which we must approach the convictions of others.

“The condition required for truly weighing evidence is to approach it with the right and not the wrong presuppositions. I wish so far to shift the inquiry from the application of first principles to the first principles themselves. Of course I believe in fact that my own first principles—such, e.g., as belief in God, in the Incarnation, in the Holy Spirit, in a Church with divinely-appointed ministries and sacraments—are true. But that is not all my point. My point is that the conclusions to be reached so largely consist

\* *Moberly: Ministerial Priesthood, 2d ed., Preface,*  
*page viii.*

of necessary applications of such first principles, that it is the first principles themselves which most need to be examined; because it is only in the light of these that the things which are to them subordinate and accessory can themselves be rightly discerned. I am not asking to have my presuppositions blindly assumed. I am asking to have the place and importance of presuppositions recognized; and so to have the presuppositions, as such, deliberately and on both sides, cross-examined.”\*

I am to cross-examine my own convictions, or, as Dr. Moberly calls them, presuppositions, not in any spirit of distrust or doubt of that which has been taught me by God through His Church, through my pastors, my parents, the whole experience of my life, but in a spirit of the deepest humility and of distrust of my own capacity to com-

\* Moberly: *Ministerial Priesthood*, 2d ed., Preface, page ix.

prehend to the uttermost that teaching. I am to cross-examine the presuppositions of my brethren, not that I may upset them, as the lawyer, who seeks not the truth but a victory for his client, tries to upset a witness, nor that I may gain the applause of the unthinking and glory and power for myself and my Church, like a political candidate on the platform, but that I may see what there is which is precious in my brother's convictions, so that I may myself gain, and perhaps help him to gain, a deeper insight into truth.

For example, though one fears to attempt definition and there is danger of misconception even in the use of a hypothetical illustration, there are two conceptions, at first seemingly as far asunder as the poles, of the Church,—one of the Church as invisible, yet also visible, with divinely appointed ministries and sacraments, commissioned by Christ, its Head,—or rather, of

the Church as the abiding manifestation and extension of His Incarnation, an outward and visible sign of the eternal, underlying reality of the Body of Christ; the other, of the visible Church as a company of believers, its organization reflecting the convictions of its members, neither possessing nor needing any historic continuity in its ministry, and not in any organic way the manifestation or expression of the invisible Church in which they believe.

May it not be possible that if those who hold these divergent views would meet in conference for a mutual cross-examination which should be an effort not to defeat and humiliate, but to understand each other, each would find that the other is at least partly right?

Is it not possible that what Dr. Moberly says in another context for a particular purpose is at least generally true of this, as of most of our

attempts to state our convictions as to absolute truth?

“Neither of these positions is absolutely true. There is always some truth represented in the other. Each begins to be positively false, when it tries to exclude the truth which the other represents; but in its positive effort, each sees a real aspect of truth.”\*

Is there not something, at least, of value in both the “Catholic” and “Protestant” conceptions of the Church? Even if only one of them can be finally accepted, is not the other a help toward the fuller comprehension of that one? Both “Catholics” and “Protestants” believe that the Holy Spirit is always and everywhere present in the world. They believe, too, that the life of God Incarnate is continuous and all-pervading, shared by all who are members of Him, so that St. Paul’s definition of the Church as the mystical Body of

\* Moberly: *Atonement and Personality*, page 220.

Christ is something far more than a poetical phrase. Do not "Protestants" need to recognize that the reality of that Body can be apprehended by humanity only through a visible and external form, continuous and definite? Cannot "Catholics" gain something by recognizing more fully the value of the voluntary activity of men in accepting the fullest measure possible of their responsibility for coöperation in the work for which the Church exists? Was not the origin of the ultra Protestant conception perhaps the over-emphasis placed by those who proclaimed it on human freedom, or perhaps the failure of Catholics to give due recognition to God's desire for the free and voluntary coöperation of man?

But whether this suggestion is valuable or not is immaterial. The real question is whether by seeking to understand each other better and to see wherein we really differ, we could not

help each other, and whether, sometimes at least, our differences would not be resolved into statements of different aspects of one truth.

Moreover, we should find that our differences often consist merely in our explanations of the truth, or the inferences which we draw from the facts of revelation, from the teaching of the Church, and from our own conceptions of the attributes of God. The history of the doctrine of the Atonement is a long and often a sad story of the efforts of finite minds to explain and to limit the methods of God's love and mercy and justice. We imagine God like unto ourselves, and then make inferences from that false, or at least inadequate, image. In conference perhaps we can help each other to see the inadequacy of those convictions, and, if we can set bounds to the presumption of our inferences, we shall gain that true humility of mind which is necessary for the

apprehension of any truth. For we must cease to confound the eternal realities of the Facts of the Faith with our explanations and comprehension of them. What Dr. Moberly says about the explanations of different generations is equally applicable to those of different minds, and perhaps of different communions, in the same generation:

“Atonement is a reality much too fundamental to human consciousness to be capable of any ready explanation. Our explanations, at their best, are still always partial explanations. It is always more than our understanding of it.

“From this there follow two direct results. The first is a certain duty of what has been called ‘reverent agnosticism.’ Our insight into the doctrine may be adequate. That it should be exhaustive is inconceivable. All explanations must be given with this re-

serve. They are not, and never can be, the whole truth. There is always more than human logic can express, or human imagination conceive. ‘Quod si aliquatenus quaestioni tuae satisfacere potero, certum esse debebit, quia et sapientior me plenius hoc facere poterit; imo sciendum est, quidquid homo inde dicere vel scire possit, altiores tantae rei adhuc latere rationes.’ (St. Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo*, ch. ii.)

“The second result is that human explanations, being all, of necessity, aspects which are less than complete, must from time to time vary and be readjusted. Atonement can, and must, become intelligible, to different stages of human intellect. It can, and must, express itself in the terms of thought of different generations, and to some extent different philosophies.”\*

Neither St. Anselm nor Dr. Moberly means to throw the slightest doubt

\* *Moberly: Atonement and Personality, Preface, page ix.*

upon the authoritative declarations of the Church or the truth revealed in the Bible. What they are warning us against is our presumption in thinking that we fully comprehend those declarations and that truth. And the true conference spirit accepts their warnings. For if I dare to maintain that I fully understand the infinite revelation by God of Himself to man, I am driven to declare that you, who differ from me, are hopelessly wrong. But if I could only so forget myself as to see that my conception of infinite truth can only be inadequate, I shall be able to see that your different conception may be the supplement to mine.

What the Conference needs from all of us is, first, such prayer for the guidance of the Holy Spirit as shall compel our souls and minds to that humility and love which will fit us to call ourselves by the name of Christ and to receive from Him and from each other a fuller

comprehension of the truth. Then we shall so search our consciences and our convictions to their very depths, that when our convictions are stated at the Conference, the human element of error shall be eliminated, and they shall stand forth as statements of so much of infinite truth as our experience enables us to receive. Who can doubt that many of our differences will seem to have had no foundation whatever, except in our ignorance of each other, and that such as shall remain will be seen in their true perspective, the way being opened for the growth of all into one mind?

PRAYERS FOR THE PEACE AND UNITY OF  
THE CHURCH

O LORD JESUS CHRIST, Who saidst unto Thine Apostles, Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you; Regard not our sins, but the faith of Thy Church, and grant her that peace and unity which is agreeable to Thy will; Who livest and reignest God for ever and ever. Amen.

O LORD JESUS CHRIST, look with pity, we beseech Thee, upon Thy Church weakened and hindered by differences and divisions; bless the effort to bring together in conference all who confess the faith of Thy Holy Name; Who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Ghost, God, for ever and ever. Amen.